Engage for Inclusion: A Shared Wisdom Hub on Building Resilient, Accessible Cities

November 2025

G3ict
The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs
Advancing the Rights to Digital Access for Persons with Disabilities

UCLG
United Cities and Local Governments

Microsoft

Contents

Foreword

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At Microsoft, accessibility is a fundamental part of our mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. We know that when technology, services, and environments are designed inclusively from the start, people gain more independence, communities grow stronger, and innovation reaches everyone.

Our solutions, partnerships, programs, and people are creating collective impact. More than 5 million people have participated in our AI Skilling programs focused on accessibility. In 2025, we launched new technology to help people with disabilities play, work, and live—through an Adaptive Joystick for Xbox, sign language detection in Teams, low vision keyboards for Surface, and AI-powered visual descriptions in Windows. When accessibility is a priority, everyone benefits.

As cities accelerate their digital transformation, accessibility must be a part of the strategy and implementation. Public services, mobility systems, emergency communications, and civic participation increasingly depend on digital tools. Yet with less than 4% of the world's websites accessible, technology can often create barriers and widen the digital divide for persons with disabilities and older persons. Building truly "smart" cities means building technology solutions that work for all people, across the full range of abilities, ages, languages, and lived experiences.

That is why we have partnered with G3ict through its Smart Cities for All initiative—to help advance practical, scalable approaches that embed accessibility into policy, procurement, design, and implementation. Together, we are convening cities, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society, and industry to share what works, learn from one another, and translate the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into real, measurable outcomes at the local level. This report captures the insights and examples surfaced through Engage for Inclusion, with the goal of accelerating progress toward resilient, accessible cities where technology empowers everyone to achieve more.

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As urban populations continue to grow at an unprecedented pace, cities around the world are navigating a pivotal moment. The rapid expansion of urban life brings with it both pressing challenges and transformative opportunities. Opportunities to protect and expand human rights, rebuild public trust, and place universal access to local public services at the center of equitable development. By 2050, this urban landscape will include nearly 2 billion older persons and persons with disabilities, a demographic shift that demands intentional, inclusive, and future-proofed planning.

In this context, the urgency for local and regional governments to localize the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has never been clearer. The CRPD provides a global blueprint for ensuring equality, dignity, and full participation for persons with disabilities. When its principles are integrated into local governance - including urban planning, digital transformation, public service delivery, emergency preparedness, mobility systems, and community engagement, cities can become powerful enablers of equity. Local and regional governments hold a unique position as the closest level of government to residents and the community. They can translate human rights into tangible interventions through equitable public service provision to ensure that all persons, regardless of age or disability, are included, empowered, and protected.

Achieving this vision requires more than compliance. It calls for aligned, human-centered regulatory and care systems that mainstream accessibility and inclusion into every urban policy and operational decision; putting people and the planet first. Implementation must be supported by local and regional efforts to raise awareness on digital rights, strengthen digital skills, and build a culture of inclusion. It must also rely on robust digital connectivity, accessible and affordable communication and information technologies, and strategic use of data analytics, enabling continuous monitoring, learning, and improvement. Similarly, as local and regional governments adopt AI into their practices, inclusion should guide both the process and the outcome.

This is the foundation upon which equitable, adaptive, and resilient cities and territories are built. The Engage for Inclusion initiative explores how local and regional governments can utilize digital technologies to design and implement inclusive strategies that strengthen human rights-based care systems and resilience for all residents, upholding the rights of all persons with disabilities. As urban environments evolve, our collective responsibility is to build the foundations of a renewed locally-rooted social

contract to ensure that no one is left behind—and that every individual has the opportunity to thrive in and contribute to the future of cities for all.

Executive Summary

Background and Context

1.1 Preamble of Smart Cities and Trends

With more than half of the global population currently living in urban areas, cities must adequately prepare to harness the social, economic, environmental, and infrastructural opportunities associated with welcoming and sustaining larger populations.

Modern cities are becoming hotspots for new ideas and better ways of living. It's becoming clear that our old ways of building cities can't keep up with the complex challenges we face today.

Within this framework, Smart Cities have emerged as sustainable, connected, and optimized urban environments that leverage technology to enhance the quality of life of their inhabitants. The socioeconomic and environmental repercussions of rapid urban growth demand solutions that integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs), data-driven solutions, and people-centered planning, ensuring that cities remain resilient, efficient, and inclusive.

By harnessing digital technologies, data analytics, and intelligent infrastructure, Smart Cities aim to develop more efficient programs, reduce energy consumption, minimize carbon emissions, and optimize the use of public spaces while fostering transparent communication with their citizens.

It is important to recognize that cities are not only inhabited by permanent residents. They also serve as destinations for individuals who commute for work, leisure, or to access essential services. Consequently, urban planning must account for the diverse range of people who interact with the city, ensuring that products, services, and infrastructure are available to all who enter its territory.

Projections indicate that by 2050, the global population will reach 9 billion people, with an estimated 70% living in urban areas. This demographic shift highlights the importance of preparing cities to accommodate such growth. Smart Cities are undergoing a digital transformation at the process level as well as in the deployment of services and programs to respond more dynamically to the pace of city growth and transformation, and to collect critical, real-time information that enables more efficient responses. This digital transformation serves as a tool for designing and maintaining public spaces and facilitates communication between city administrators and their residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of urban systems. With lockdowns, travel restrictions, supply chain disruptions, and the closure of manufacturing and service sectors, the importance of adaptive, resilient, and human-centered city

planning has been revealed. The crisis demonstrated that technology must not only optimize resources but also strengthen public health, social inclusion, and economic stability to withstand unexpected circumstances.

While sustainability and environmental protection have become central themes in urban development, efforts directed towards inclusion for persons with disabilities and older persons remain limited. As populations grow, they also age, and with aging comes an increase in disability due to age-related conditions.

Cities must recognize persons with disabilities and older persons as key actors who actively interact with and shape the built and digital environment. A city that fails to be inclusive towards individuals with disabilities and older persons cannot truly be considered “smart”. Inclusivity must be a fundamental pillar of urban innovation, ensuring that technological advancements benefit all members of society. A Smart City nurtures a vibrant social environment, where digital tools bridge the gap between communities, reducing social isolation and fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging.

Embedding accessibility in the city’s planning, governance, digital service delivery, and urban areas is imperative for a truly successful Smart City. Individuals and collectives must be able to access and use digital services proficiently, irrespective of factors such as gender, age, disability, geographical location, and the specific circumstances in which these technologies are employed.

Smart Cities are making the digital divide bigger

G3ict Smart Cities for All survey of global experts & entrepreneurs highlighted that 60% of respondents think Smart Cities are failing persons with disabilities, and 33% are unsure if persons with disabilities can use their smart solutions. The results of this survey highlight a critical gap in city governance: the lack of a systematic evaluation of citizens' satisfaction with public services and alignment with international standards for accessible ICT. To build truly inclusive and effective cities, it is essential to measure the lived experiences of all residents, regardless of their age, race, disability, or background. Understanding how diverse groups experience and interact with public services enables city leaders to design policies and solutions that meet the needs of the entire community. Failing to prioritize universal design while creating smart solutions creates new barriers and widens the digital divide.

To truly break down institutional silos and accelerate a coherent, citywide, inclusive transformation, cities must adopt a unified framework that places policy and regulatory alignment at its core, grounded in the CRPD. This means ensuring that critical areas, such as procurement, cybersecurity, and data governance, are not treated as isolated technical requirements but as interconnected pillars that enable trust, transparency, and equitable access to innovation. Without this alignment, even the most ambitious city initiatives risk fragmentation, inefficiency, and unequal outcomes for residents. Smart cities must establish a robust digital inclusion policy that guides long-term decision-making.

With an aligned, human-centered regulatory framework in place, successful implementation must be reinforced by efforts that empower residents and ensure equitable participation. This includes coordinated campaigns to raise awareness on digital rights and strengthen digital skills across all communities. Such a framework must be supported by strong digital connectivity, enabled through public–private partnerships that expand broadband access for everyone; affordability measures such as subsidies, tax incentives, and device financing programs; and data analytics that continuously inform, refine, and improve strategic monitoring. Together, these elements create the foundation for a digital ecosystem where every resident can fully benefit from modern public services.

1.2 Overview of the Webinar

Smart Cities are increasingly being introduced into the strategic agendas of governments across the globe. However, despite their growing prominence, there are limited platforms where cities can exchange best practices and engage in meaningful dialogue with organizations of persons with disabilities. The gap between and within the people designing city policies and the citizens who live in them produces a misalignment in urban agendas, services provided, and international organizations that provide financial support for these initiatives, leaving persons with disabilities behind in a world that isn't built for them.

The new generations of smart cities must go beyond technology. Smart Cities must be universal by design, ensuring that accessibility is embedded into every stage of development. They must also be climate-resilient, digitally empowered & community-based.

In the framework of collective responsibility, the first webinar, **Engage for Inclusion,** sponsored by Microsoft, was held in November 2025, with participation from civil society, country representatives, and global organizations. In the different sessions, participants explored the future and the role of Smart Cities in addressing socioeconomic, environmental, and technological challenges, leaving no one behind, and shared examples of effective inclusive implementation.

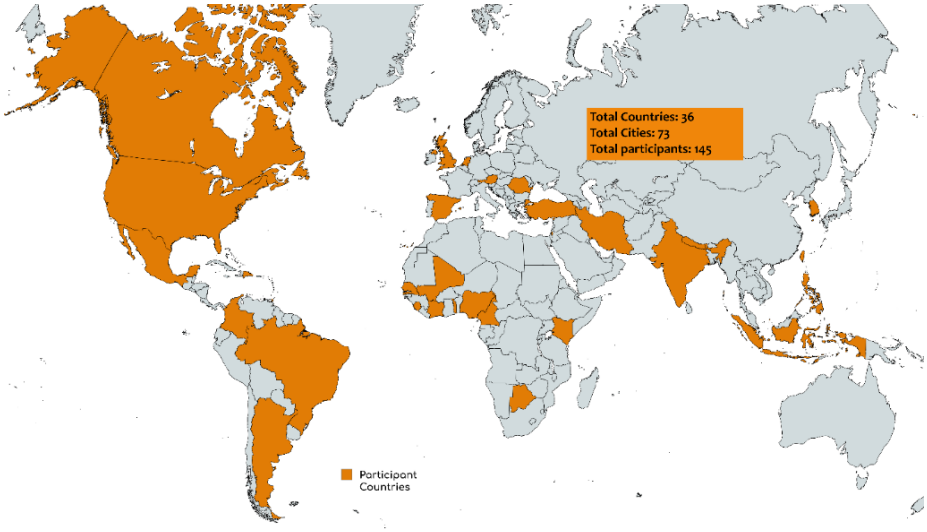
2. Webinar Details

The webinar brought together more than 140 participants from 36 countries, representing 73 cities worldwide. The regional structure of the webinar into three separate sessions was important to enable meaningful dialogue among cities, address shared challenges, regional priorities, and context-specific opportunities more effectively. This report captures the collective experiences and insights shared during the sessions, ensuring that all participants can benefit from the collaborative knowledge generated.

Open regional dialogue is essential for advancing smart city development. Cities within the same region often face similar regulatory environments, climate conditions, socio-economic realities, and infrastructure constraints. By encouraging open and continuous

regional exchanges, cities can accelerate learning, avoid duplication of efforts, and co-create solutions that are both innovative and locally relevant. Such dialogue strengthens regional cooperation, builds trust among stakeholders, and lays the foundation for scalable smart city strategies that are inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. Building on this regional foundation, cities must also look outward. International connections offer a broader perspective to identify the common challenges and opportunities that cross borders, regions, and city boundaries.

Image 1. Participants (36 countries, 73 cities, 145 participants)



Source: Own creation

Table 1. Participants per region

Source: Own creation

Asia	46.96%
America	33.91%
Africa	10.43%
Europe	8.7%

2.1 Goals of our Collaborative Webinars

The **"Engage for Inclusion - Collaborative Webinar"** had a set of objectives, all aimed at inspiring, educating, and mobilizing stakeholders to build urban environments that serve everyone.

Specific Goals:

- Highlight the importance of accessibility and inclusion in Smart City design
- Showcase real-world challenges faced by persons with disabilities and older persons in accessing public services and technology systems
- Emphasize how technology can bridge gaps between the digital and physical world for persons with disabilities
- Present successful case studies of smart city practices that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities
- Encourage dialogue between local government officials, organizations of persons with disabilities, and global organizations

3. Discussion

5.1 Session 1 Asia-Pacific & Eurasia

General Overview

The Asia-Pacific & the Eurasia region are urbanizing and advancing technologically at a rapid speed, and that growth has outpaced sustainability, inclusion, and resilience. In Asia alone, the population of cities surged from 936 million in 2000 to 1.6 billion in 2017. The accelerated urban expansion has placed immense pressure on cities, resulting in significant infrastructure challenges, increased traffic congestion, worsening air pollution, and rising energy demand.

Emerging Asian nations have experienced strong economic growth, supported by a resilience of private consumption, inbound foreign direct investment, and remittances. Complemented by a stimulus package to boost demand or support industries such as tourism, transportation, or small to medium enterprises,

The private sector has increasingly become a strategic partner in shaping the future of urban development. They are challenging how a city operates, creating a unified matrix for information on urban operations and growth.

Policymakers are working to make their cities smarter by leveraging data and digital technologies, including the Internet of Things, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, energy storage technologies, and blockchain.

Countries in the region have adopted international agreements and alliances backed by a strong community mentality. The region can adapt and integrate technology to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

Table 3. Total population, Urban population, and Older persons in the Asia-Pacific & Eurasia region in 2000, 2025, and 2050

Year	Total population	Urban population	Older Persons
2000	3,453,672,000	35.77%	5.96%
2025	4,290,523,000	51.97%	10.61%
2050	4,475,020,000	66.97%	20.21%

Source: Own creation with UN and World Bank Data

Challenges in the region:

- Lack of digital access
- Gap in digital skills and literacy
- Infrastructure gap
- Lack of policy alignment
- Coordination across different levels of government
- Lack of an appropriate and comprehensive regulatory framework to facilitate innovation while maintaining consumer data privacy

OPD Perspectives

Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in the Asia-Pacific & Eurasia region highlighted the importance of collaborative action for the deployment of mainstream inclusive services and the interaction between the digital and physical worlds.

Urban inclusion requires joint action between city authorities and ODPs. Long-term, sustainable, and true accessibility can only be achieved through the link between policy, design, and lived experience insights. Collaboration ensures services are built by and for persons with disabilities.

Each sector brings its own unique contribution:

- OPDs bring ground-level knowledge of barriers in transport, housing, and public spaces.
- Cities bring infrastructure, policy, and budget.

Some inclusive service points that should be mainstreamed are:

- Accessible public transport (such as low-floor buses, tactile paths, audio announcements
- Inclusive health, education, and social services where accessibility is built in, not added later

Digital services amplify physical accessibility, such as:

- Real-time accessible transport apps
- Navigation apps with voice and haptic cues
- Telehealth for mobility-limited users

- Digital forms replacing long physical queues

Physical environments must support digital tools:

- QR codes at an accessible height
- Wi-Fi in public spaces
- Smart kiosks with screen readers
- Creating a seamless physical-digital ecosystem that empowers persons with disabilities to navigate cities independently

A model that prioritizes collaboration between the digital-physical world leads to autonomy and dignity for persons with disabilities, stronger and more resilient cities, and better economic participation and innovation.

Table 4. Challenges and Solutions presented by OPDs

Challenge	Solution
Diverse needs by diverse disabilities	Co-creation with OPDs in every stage
Complexity of planning due to multiple layers of accessibility	Adopt Universal Design from the beginning
Limited awareness and technical skills	Build technical capacity in city systems
Adding accessibility later becomes expensive and time-consuming	Strengthen digital accessibility (ensure everything meets criteria, such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines-WCAG) from the beginning
Fragmented Coordination between stakeholders	Strengthen inter-departmental coordination
Weak integration of digital & physical systems	Integrate physical and digital infrastructure, with affordable assistive technologies
Limited budget resulting in cities prioritizing visible infrastructure over accessibility	Dedicated accessibility budgets & incentives
Inadequate feedback & testing with OPDs, solutions may technically meet a guideline but fail in real-life usability	Conduct regular audits and feedback mechanisms

Global Organizations Perspective

Global organizations play a critical role in projects involving persons with disabilities as they provide resources, visibility, and sustainability that some local systems lack to supply on their own.

They are established for the transformation of cities into smart, sustainable cities through facilitating public-private partnerships. They serve as an international platform to improve the quality of life, innovate in the delivery of public services, and strengthen regional competitiveness.

Recognizing the pivotal role of Artificial Intelligence in shaping more efficient and inclusive cities, one notable example of a successful public–private partnership in the region is the collaboration developed with SK Telecom.

SK Telecom is the no. 1 Telecom Company in Korea.

With a vision to do good AI through:

- AI Business
- AI Governance
- AI ESG

With different projects such as:

1. AI Care
    a. AI call centers for the older persons living alone, providing service for approximately 260,000 older persons who live alone in Korea
    b. Identify and support vulnerable groups in need of AI-based care through collaboration with local governments
2. Sullivan +
    a. AI-based visual assistant and voice guidance service for the visually impaired population
    b. Enhance accessibility services developed by the startup Tuat by integrating SKT's AI capabilities

5.1.2 Cities' shared experiences

1.- Singapore, Singapore – Citizen Identification

Total City Population: 6,157,270

In a high-income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 97.7

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

Singapore has high levels of connectivity, with 99% of resident households connected to the internet and 98% of households with school-going children having access to computers. 97% of residents own smartphones with a mobile penetration rate at 166.1%

After COVID there was a digitalization ramp-up, with super-apps that adopt smart as enablers for economic growth.

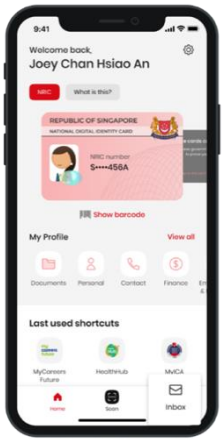
singpass

First released in 2003 as a login mechanism for government transactions, Singpass has become a key form of authentication, on which all government webpages and services, as well as some private corporations and major banks, rely.

It has become central to Singaporeans' digital life, with over 41 million transactions made per month.

With inclusive design for all residents:

- Inclusion beyond WCAG, 4 vernacular languages (English, Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay)
- The use of Myinfo draws on Singpass data to prefill and auto-populate key information for government form-filling
- Voiceover mode allows ease of access in switching apps. Link to their original browser/app first element encountered



At the beginning, developers did not have persons with disabilities in mind, but they updated their vision and included them. Working collaboratively with user-testers with disabilities, proactively fixing issues.

2.- Makassar, Indonesia - Participatory data collection

Total City Population: 1,737,390

In an Upper Middle-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 84.7

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

Kota Kita collaborated with UNESCO, the **Makassar city** government, and PerDIK[1], their key partner organizations of persons with disabilities, to document the lives of individuals with disabilities in the city to address the gap in disability data.

- 53 young enumerators
- Data collected from 153 neighborhoods, including 12 islands

[1] PerDIK (Persatuan Penyandang Disabilitas Indonesia Kota) commonly refers to organizations or associations that work for the rights of persons with disabilities in Indonesia

- Completed in one month

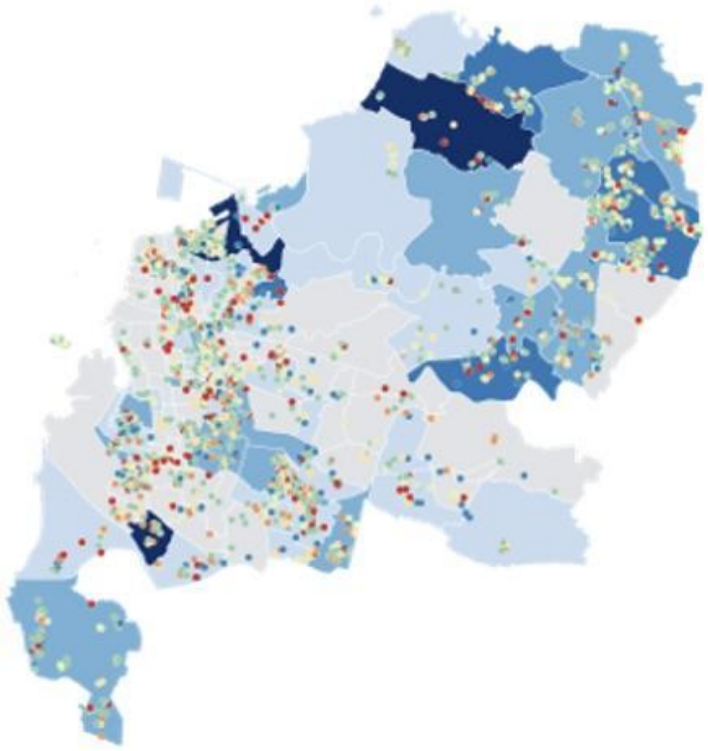
KOTA KITA
A CITY FOR ALL

Kota Kita used participatory digital data collection along with geotagging to document the lives of individuals with disabilities in the city.

Findings:

1. 5,171 persons with disabilities living in the city of Makassar, three times higher than official government data.
2. Identification of challenges faced by persons with disabilities in education, health, employment, mobility, disaster preparedness, among others. For example, 7.8% of respondents do not have a national ID card, which hinders their access to social security
3. 3,183 persons with disabilities live in areas with medium to high flood risk; less than 1% of the total population with disabilities received disaster preparedness training or information
4. 81.7% of persons with disabilities in Makassar do not use assistive devices, and 69% lack direct access to digital devices

Spatial Distribution of Persons with Disabilities in Makassar by Disability



Color Indicator	Disability Type
Red	Autism
Orange	Intellectual Disability
Green	Psychosocial Disability
Light Blue	Multiple Disabilities
Yellow	Physical Disability
Purple	Visual Disability

Shade Color (Light → Dark)	Number of Persons with Disabilities
Very Light Blue	19 – 70
Light Blue	71 – 82
Medium Blue	83 – 96
Dark Blue	97 – 130
Very Dark Blue	181 – 256

Source: Makassar: A Disability-Inclusive City Profile, Kota Kita and UNESCO

Key takeaways:

- AI-powered tools and digital platforms increase independence and participation for persons with disabilities
- Limited access to digital devices only widens the digital divide, hindering persons with disabilities from accessing basic services and fulfilling their rights.

To address this, Kota Kita organized capacity-building sessions for young persons with disabilities, helping them maximize digital tools for advocacy.

3. Makassar, Indonesia - Accessibility audit training

Kota Kita collaborated with PerDIK to empower youth with disabilities through evidence-based advocacy. They used 3D models, *Google Maps* and *My Maps* to enhance understanding of universal design and disability-inclusive auditing by recording, geo-tagging and documenting barriers in public infrastructure.

The program empowered youth with disabilities to take an active role in advocacy, moving beyond being passive recipients of policies and programs by engaging as informed citizens, strengthening their capacity to protect and fulfill their rights.

Distinct findings across disability groups revealed challenges with visual elements, mobility barriers, and navigation. Gathering insights through in-person lived experiences strengthens advocacy and recognizes youth with disabilities as key stakeholders. Additionally, easy-to-use apps enhance accessibility, improve connection, and enable persons with disabilities to express their vision for safer, more inclusive cities.

Kota Kita's Inclusive City Movement in Makassar has inspired and driven significant change in the city's planning process. For the first time, Makassar implemented thematic participatory planning and budgeting (Musrenbang Tematik) focused on the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as women and children. The data collected also served as a baseline for the city government and organizations of persons with disabilities to develop the City Local Action Plan on Persons with Disabilities.

MyMaps Findings with Case Study: Andi Djemma Street, Makassar

Source: Makassar: A Disability-Inclusive City Profile, Kota Kita and UNESCO, 2025

4.- Freetown, Sierra Leone – Open data mapping

Total City Population: 1,387,360

In a Low-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 34.3

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

The Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT) is an international team dedicated to humanitarian action and community development through open mapping.

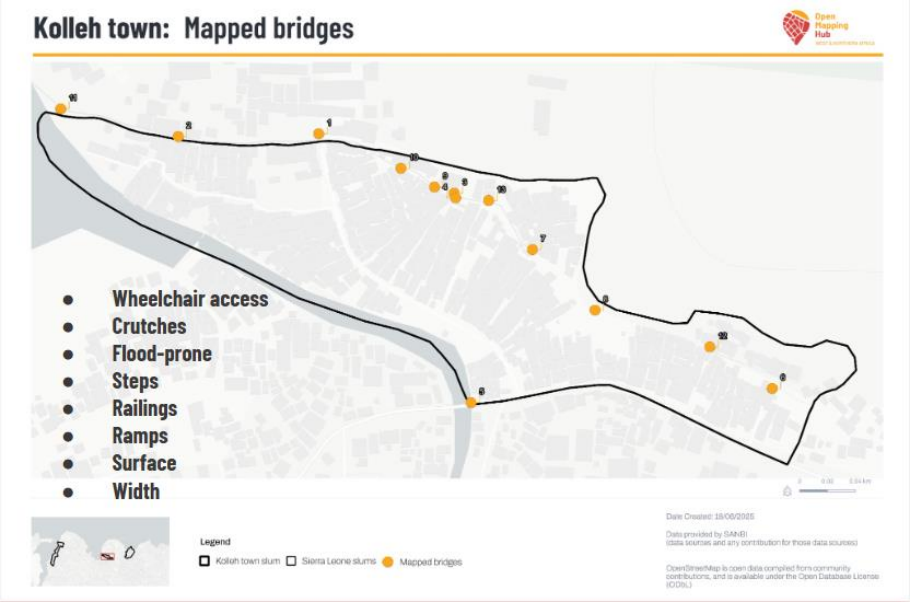
Persons living with disabilities in informal settlements face barriers to mobility and access to public infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities

HOT, **Freetown City** Council, and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) collaborated to develop a method of analysis for identifying improvements in three informal settlements.

Toolchain: inclusivity and access analysis with expert engagement:

1. Aerial Imagery: citizens used low-cost drones and open-source tools to generate high-quality imagery of the entire city
2. Remote mapping: with high-quality imagery, buildings, bridges and roads were digitized with open-source tools
3. AI-Assisted Mapping
4. Field Mapping
5. Map Download
6. Map Use

Freetown, Sierra Leone



Source: HOT, Freetown City Council, and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD).

Next steps:

- Test analysis by supporting the implementation of improvements
- Foster new collaborative partnerships and coalitions
- Test and refine the methodology in other cities and contexts
- Support city authorities and accessibility actors to incorporate open mapping in urban planning processes
- Facilitate greater participation of PWDs in the mapping and analysis processes

5.1.3 Key Takeaways on the Asia-Pacific & Eurasia region

- Policies are not enough to implement solutions; training is vital.
- Inclusive cities are future-ready cities
- Accessibility standards are contingent; there is a vast array of sources for developers, such as national guidelines, online resources, and WCAG
- Promoting inclusion in cities has had the power of evidence-based advocacy
- Developing innovative solutions to social problems by integrating complementary resources
- Empathy, rapid execution, ambition, and urgency are core principles to implement accessible solutions

Empowering persons with disabilities through participatory, data-driven advocacy and accessible digital tools not only bridges the digital divide but also enables them to actively shape their communities and cities. By centering lived experiences and leveraging technology, cities can create more inclusive environments, ensuring no one is left behind.

5.2 Session 2. Americas

5.2.1 General Overview of the Region

Latin America is among the most urbanized regions of the world. With cities facing complex infrastructure demands, inequality, digital exclusion, and limited access to water, education, healthcare, and transportation. With rapid population growth, greater technological penetration, rising household incomes, and shifting expectations about quality of life, cities are undergoing profound transformation. However, most cities in the region share common issues such as insecurity, poverty, inequality, and pollution.

Smart cities must be understood through the lens of how their many components interact in real time and how residents meaningfully engage with these systems. Smart city technologies help address evolving urban needs by enabling integrated services, improving efficiency, and supporting broader community goals.

As cities strive to enhance the quality of life, investments in sustainability, public safety, and resilient infrastructure have become essential. Achieving these ambitions depends on strong collaboration between government, the private sector, and citizens, each playing a vital role in shaping inclusive, responsive, and future-ready urban environments.

Such rapid urban growth requires smart city solutions to address the challenges it presents, such as infrastructure overload, housing shortage, and rising costs, environmental stress, pressure on public services, inequality and exclusion, governance and coordination gaps, safety, and digital transformation pressures. Investments in the region continue to rise, and municipal governments are recognizing the need for urban infrastructure development.

In the region, improving residents' quality of life requires smarter use of data to manage resources and deliver public services more efficiently. At the same time, it is essential to integrate social considerations into decision-making to ensure that new technologies and innovations remain sustainable, equitable, and widely accepted by the community. Strengthening public safety, one of the most pressing concerns, must be a central focus of these efforts, supported by inclusive strategies that address the needs of all residents

There has been a realization that stakeholder collaboration is key to developing smart cities in America. The model implies a more coordinated and articulated vision of the city, in which citizens play a more active role and technological tools enable quicker decision-making and service management.

Table 5. Total population, Urban population, and Older persons in the Americas region in 2000, 2025, and 2050

Year	Total population	Urban population	Older persons
2000	833,613,144	76.33%	7.96%
2025	1,053,603,507	81.4%	12.66%
2050	1,151,774,644	92.61%	20.39%

Source: Own creation with UN and World Bank Data

OPD Perspectives

Independent living centers demonstrate that autonomy grows when people can make meaningful choices about their own lives. In Nuevo León, city leaders and residents with disabilities have increasingly recognized the importance of building a city with the community. Accessibility requires designing beyond a single disability category, considering the broad spectrum of physical, sensory, cognitive, and psychological needs that shape how citizens interact with their environment.

Designing inclusively from the start makes it far less likely that any group will be forgotten, when accessibility is embedded into the design process, rather than added as an afterthought, it becomes easier, more cost-effective, and more aligned with lived experience.

A universally designed environment increases empathy, builds awareness, and strengthens community understanding of the barriers that are often hidden from them.

AI has become a transformative force for persons with disabilities through accessible digital technologies, disability-disaggregated data, and the participation of persons with disabilities in tech development. AI deployment must align with existing human rights obligations, not create new barriers.

AI offers powerful tools for inclusion. Cities can support blind and low-vision residents through AI-driven navigation, wayfinding, smart crossings, and accessible chatbots for city information and public services. At a smaller scale, AI can generate alternative text, captions, simplified language, and other accessibility features, especially when paired with human review to ensure the quality and lived-experience accuracy.

Better data leads to better decisions. AI-based analytics can help cities identify accessibility gaps and invest more effectively in inclusive urban infrastructure.

However, AI also brings potential risks. AI systems can deepen inequality through algorithmic discrimination in hiring, inaccessible digital interfaces, or affordability and knowledge barriers that widen the digital divide. Accessibility is still missing from many AI standards, leading to being overlooked in frameworks.

To prevent these harms, organizations of persons with disabilities must be involved in setting priorities, co-designing solutions, testing systems, and monitoring whether new technologies truly work.

Inclusive AI deployment requires:

- Accessible by design AI policies that require WCAG compliance and assistive-tech compatibility
- Embedding OPDs in governance, in project scoping, design, testing, and evaluation
- Using disability-disaggregated data responsibly, with consent, privacy, and evidence-based decision-making
- Audit AI used in HR and public functions, identify disability bias, and provide accessible human alternatives.

Global Organizations Perspectives

Global organizations in the Americas highlighted the inaccessible environment and settlement patterns, as well as poverty and limited access to basic services, as key challenges to address when developing smart cities initiatives.

Through a combination of policy advice, technical assistance, and on-the-ground action, the collective vision for the cities can be achieved. Global Organizations serve as the focal point for all organizations and human settlement matters, such as UN-Habitat and the Global Disability Fund. Building inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable communities.

Thriving alternative actions require substantial cohesive, complementary efforts. Through city networks, there are soft and hard processes and structures, as well as investments in infrastructure, technology, and work.

It is also about the localization of available integrated services.

Key aspects for persons with disabilities include:

- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Economic independence
- Capacity to make choices
- Engagement in community

Article 19 of the CRPD should be seen as an instrument for advancing cities' agendas.

Did you know?
Article 19 of the CRPD ensures the right to live independently and be included in the community. Requiring States to provide support, community services, and accessible environments so persons with disabilities can make their own choices and participate fully, preventing isolation and segregation.

5.2.2 Cities' shared experiences

1. Mexico City, Mexico – Emergency communications

Total City Population: 22,752,400

In an Upper Middle-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 82.3

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

The Agency for Digital Public Innovation (ADIP) in Mexico City is responsible for leading policies on data management, open government, citizen engagement, digital governance, technology governance, and digital infrastructure. In the city, approximately 140,000 residents have hearing disabilities, which often creates barriers when accessing public services.

In response, ADIP acknowledged the need to strengthen autonomy in direct communication, ensuring that persons with hearing impairments can interact with government services without relying on external interpreters, friends or family members. Promoting the full exercise of the independent rights of persons with hearing impairments.

ADIP now provides access to professional interpreters for a wide range of government procedures- from driver's license applications and tax payments to reporting issues such as broken traffic lights or other public concerns.

The service aims to operate with broad availability: currently from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with the goal of expanding towards a 24 hour 7 days a week.

With just two clicks, users can access support without having to answer personal information questions. The initiative was carried out through a recruitment and training process, consultations with different members of the community to understand their expectations from the service. The service was built in-house using open-source tools, ensuring long-term sustainability and adaptability.

2. New York City, United States – Workplace Development

Total City Population: 8,478,072

In a High-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 97.4

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

To advance career success for persons with disabilities in New York, the city launched the Center for Workplace Accessibility and Inclusion, a branch of the Office of Talent and Workforce Development. Developing a multi-agency collaboration plan for New Yorkers with disabilities by investing in innovative direct services and programs, addressing the structural barriers, and launching the structure for workplace accessibility and inclusion

	% WORKING	% POVERTY
NYC Adults with Disabilities	40%	32%
NYC Adults without Disabilities	77%	14%
Percentage Gap	37%	19%

Source: NYC Talent and Workforce Development

The center aims to connect 2,500 New Yorkers with disabilities to career-track jobs by July 2026. Currently being a little over 1680.

The City is investing more than USD $10 million over six years (2024-2029) to design and implement new training and employment programs, expand services to workforce career centers, and offer paid internships.

New York must strengthen its role as a model employer by making city jobs and workplaces more accessible and inclusive.

Through a diverse hiring program, through a civil service program called 55A, and the inclusive internship partnership, which is funded by the office, working with 250 interns in city agencies.

Did you know?
NYC jobs require that candidates take and pass a competitive civil service exam before they can be hired. **Section 55-a** of the New York State Civil Service Law allows a qualified person with a certified mental or physical disability to be hired into competitive civil service positions without having to take an exam.

3. New York City, United States – Digital Accessibility Training

The alliance with Microsoft to develop digital accessibility training has allowed city employees to receive training on how to make things accessible, along with a local law that mandated all city agencies to create a five-year accessibility plan.

The training has a series of modules available to 300,000 New York City employees. The modules focus on accessibility introduction, how to use digital accessibility tools and features, accessibility principles and guidelines, and creating accessible content.

Challenges from NYC Talent and Workforce Development:

- Necessary partnership with both the city and the state
- Public agencies must help to identify and eliminate program barriers for persons with disabilities

4. São Paulo, Brazil – Intermediation Center

Total City Population: 22,990,000

In a Upper Middle-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 84.4

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

In São Paulo, over 719 thousand persons, who are 2 years or older, live with a disability, 145 thousand persons with permanent difficulty to listen, and 400 thousand persons with permanent difficulty to see.

Similar to the practice in Mexico City, but predating it, the government has established a Center for persons who speak sign language in Brazil (Libras). With almost 900 positions installed in public services, such as hospitals, health units, commissaries, etc., persons with hearing or speaking disabilities can access the service through computers or the app.

Navigation is financed by the mayor's office, so it does not consume cellular data. Having over 98 thousand calls and 43,315 downloads of the app since 2018, the year of its launch.

5. São Paulo, Brazil – Digital Accessibility Seal

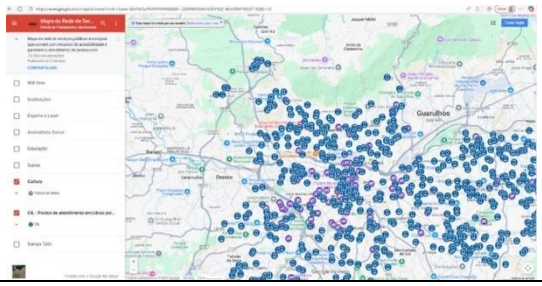
The Seal was created to guarantee accessibility on websites, conforming to national accessibility standards. All mayors' offices have the seal, as well as some enterprises and social organizations. It has become a tool of automatic evaluation, report, and settings recommendations. The total of Seals since 2018 is 190.

Challenges of the Municipality of São Paulo:

- Training for public servants or private agents on the use of Sign Language Interpretation Center (CIL), which allows persons with hearing impairments and deaf persons to access any public services in the city of São Paulo
- Many companies in the city are still unaware of the Digital Seal
- Companies are not making progress in accessibility, despite having a diagnosis detailing the necessary improvements to their websites

- Some companies do not update the Seal (valid for 2 years)

Other policies implemented by the City Hall

Map of the Accessible Services Network An interactive map that helps users locate public facilities and services that offer accessibility resources for persons with disabilities.	
Center for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder – ASD Center Public, multidisciplinary center dedicated to offering comprehensive, free, and humanized support to persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their families, and caregivers	
Casa Mãe Paulistana for mothers of persons with disabilities A center that provides dedicated support, relief, and empowerment for mothers and caregivers of persons with disabilities	

5.2.3 Key Takeaways on the Americas region

- Autonomy grows when persons with disabilities can make meaningful choices
- Accessibility must go beyond single disability categories, considering physical, sensory, cognitive and psychological needs
- Embedding accessibility early is more cost-efficient
- Involving persons without disabilities in accessibility exercises build empathy and understanding of hidden barriers
- AI can provide clear benefits for persons with disabilities, but it also comes with risks in algorithmic discrimination
- Sharing the information with city agencies and nonprofit partners is crucial for collaboration

Inclusive urban development requires embedding accessibility from the start, leveraging AI responsibly, ensuring OPD participation, and scaling best practices across cities.

Solutions do not have to be at the biggest scale; sometimes signaling crosswalks by the smell of rosemary can be enough.

5.3 Session 3. Africa, the Middle East and West Asia (MEWA) & Europe

5.3.1 General Overview of the Region

Africa, MEWA, and Europe are very diverse from each other. Nevertheless, each of them has adopted Smart Cities as global testbeds for urban innovation. In each country, initiatives have been adopted through different channels, each embracing the Smart City in its own localized way.

The African Smart city market is expected to generate $1.5 billion in revenue by the end of 2025. Across the continent, ambitious projects are reshaping urban environments. From housing to healthcare, mobility to governance, the projects are laying the digital and infrastructure groundwork for more inclusive and sustainable cities.

Citizens in Africa still have to prioritize social justice, promote accessibility, and foster cultural sensitivity towards persons with disabilities and older persons. The synergy between technology, innovation, and futuristic placemaking has led to more efficient city governance, leveraging technologies such as cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

In the MEWA region, there have been pioneering initiatives that have evolved smart city projects and programs to redefine what is possible. Digital strategies have rolled out at a national level to create conditions to support the growth in the region. Citizens are becoming part of the digital workforce, participating in the digital enhancement of infrastructure and critical urban assets. However, sometimes rapid technological adoption can outpace social inclusion.

European cities have been leading the way on smart city development for over a decade. Cities are pioneers in testing and implementing innovative, sustainable, and integrated solutions to become greener and more efficient. They have fostered territorial and multi-level collaboration.

Nevertheless, many European cities continue to struggle with a shortage of affordable and accessible housing, high unemployment rates, and the overrepresentation of persons with disabilities and older persons in low-paid jobs. These factors place them at a heightened risk of social exclusion and leave them particularly vulnerable.

Table 6. Total population, Urban population, and Older Persons in the Africa region in 2000, 2025, and 2050

Year	Total population	Urban population	Older Persons
2000	996,349,964	29.1 %	4.48 %
2025	1,565,529,644	45.47 %	3.65 %
2050	2,446,040,893	59.44 %	5.88 %

Source: Own creation with UN and World Bank Data

Table 7. Total population, Urban population, and Older Persons in the MEWA region in 2000, 2025, and 2050

Year	Total population	Urban population	Older Persons
2000	321,410,719	50.63%	3.72%
2025	588,099,677	54.4%	4.58%
2050	833,543,569	64.67%	8.52%

Source: Own creation with UN and World Bank Data

Table 8. Total population, Urban population, and Older Persons in the Europe region in 2000, 2025, and 2050

Year	Total population	Urban population	Older Persons
2000	579,564,030	89.11%	15.37%
2025	741,990,715	76.14%	20.92%
2050	702,154,237	83.36%	28.41%

Source: Own creation with UN and World Bank Data

Challenges:

Europe	Africa and West Asia countries
• Public transportation • Unemployment and precarious work • Inaccessible Public Services and Urban Infrastructure • Digital accessibility gaps • Policy Fragmentation and Limited Enforcement	• High levels of social inequality • Internet affordability • Urbanization models clash with cultural ideologies in the region • Rapid technological adoption outpaces social inclusion • Scarce cooperation across government levels

ODP Perspectives

The deployment of digital technologies in African cities has improved service delivery, yet it has also exposed challenges related to digital inclusion, digital rights, and widening

spatial and social inequalities. These developments highlight the need for inclusive digital infrastructure, strong regulations safeguarding vulnerable sectors, and safeguarding citizens' rights in digital transformation.

A transparent, focused, and collaborative approach to digital development can help foster inclusivity. An essential condition for equitable and rights-centric smart cities. Local governments must prioritize partnerships with open digital technology providers and communities to ensure that no person or place is left behind.

Exclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities increases inequality and generates avoidable human rights violations, privileging the more fortunate and punishing the vulnerable. Therefore, cities must invest in universally designed digital technologies that are age and disability friendly. This includes accessible streets and mobility pathways, tools for persons with visual and hearing impairments, and inclusive services such as mobile banking, eHealth services, and eTransport. However, persistent gaps in basic digital skills continue to limit equitable use of these technologies.

Current initiatives have revealed several challenges:

1. Significant digital divide among youths, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and rural communities
2. Strategies, plans, and reports that consistently overlook the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities
3. Uneven access to digital and AI technologies
4. Egentrification[2]: youth-centered digital environment shaped by incomplete, unavailable, or biased data
5. Limited digital literacy and algorithmic awareness of older persons and persons with disabilities
6. Process gaps that reinforce digital ageism

Role of Organizations in Digital Inclusion

Organizations play an essential role in championing a safe, accessible, and inclusive online environment. Through awareness campaigns, advocacy, education, and collaboration with government and stakeholders, they help protect digital rights and support a more inclusive, secure, and democratic internet space. Increasing visibility of these issues in national and global urban forums, providing digital skills training to older persons and persons with disabilities, and advocating for affordable digital hardware for vulnerable communities.

[2] **Egentrification** is a term used to describe a form of **gentrification** that specifically affects **older adults**, often in ways that push them out of their long-established neighborhoods.

National and local governments should:

1. Adopt measures to reduce inequalities and enhance inclusivity in digital AI programs
2. Expand digital literacy, skills development, affordability and access to prevent egentrification[2] or “datafied” gentrification
3. Launch public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on AI’s benefits and risks, fostering trust and inclusivity
4. Consider employing universal design in AI systems to increase their utility to everyone, including accessibility to older persons and persons with disabilities
5. Address growing digital isolation challenges among these groups
6. Develop digital programs tailored to meet specific needs
7. Invest in digital technologies that are age and disability friendly, including accessible paths, mobile banking, ehealth services, and etransport
8. Convene stakeholder meetings to provide a platform for diverse stakeholders.

Global Organizations Perspectives

Global Organizations have to work with stakeholders through capacity building, matchmaking, research and development, and knowledge sharing.

WeGo is a global organization, with one of its flagship initiatives being the Smart City Prize, established in 2023. It promotes innovative and inclusive smart city models that meaningfully use technology to improve people's lives. It is open to cities, institutions, companies, and multi-stakeholder initiatives whose projects can serve as global models. Modern-day society has been transformed by digital innovation. While these advances have brought significant benefits, they have also introduced challenges, particularly the need to build inclusive cities that enhance well-being.

Technical projects developed within member cities are shared across the network, enabling collaboration and the creation of capacity-building and training programs.

The General Assembly serves as a platform for Smart Cities sessions, workshops, major roundtables, and executive committee meetings. Here, leaders discuss future priorities and set the agenda for global cooperation in smart and sustainable urban development.

Across the globe, there are many promising practices. Yet true inclusion across processes, plans, investments, and engagements requires sustained effort and collective action. Funding mechanisms must support multi-stakeholder dynamics, making sure organizations are at the center of change and providing technical assistance when needed.

5.3.2 Cities' shared experiences

1. Barcelona, Spain – Equal participation for older persons and persons with disabilities

Total City Population: 5,733,250

In a High-Income country

ICT Development Overall Index*: 93.3

*The ICT Development Overall Index of the ITU aims to assess the extent to which connectivity is universal and meaningful in a **country**.

In Barcelona, the Institute for Persons with Disabilities, as part of the city Council, is responsible for promoting accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Democratic spaces for liberation and participation must guarantee that all citizens, regardless of their abilities, can meaningfully engage in public life. Yet ensuring equal participation for persons with disabilities, older persons, and migrants remains a significant challenge.

The Institute aims to address this by developing three key pillars. First, creating an **artificial intelligence tool** within the Horizon Europe project that will simplify complex language into plain language. Available in four languages: Italian, Catalan, Spanish, and English.

Second, developing a **protocol to guide organizations** in making democratic and participatory processes more conscious, inclusive, and accessible. This protocol will be shaped through extensive annual consultations.

Third, the **AI tool will be tested in three cities**, Barcelona, Bologna and Las Rozas. With an additional pilot experiment in Malta.

Insights gathered from interviews and focus groups, both with persons with disabilities and professionals, highlight that clear and accessible information greatly enhances independent participation. Providing materials in multiple formats, such as easy-to-read texts, videos, large print printouts, or explanations, significantly improves engagement.

Through this work, IDEM is helping to remove linguistic, cognitive, and technological barriers. For citizens, the benefits include greater autonomy, improved understanding of public issues, increased trust in institutions, and the ability to express their views and influence decision-making. For public administrations, the initiative leads to clearer communications and more diverse and representative participation. The AI tool also has the potential to enhance the overall quality of the democratic process.

The protocol and tools developed by the Institute can also be transferred to other fields, including education, social services, and public communication.

Challenges:

- Technological application
- Mainstream or sell to other parts of the administration the protocols so they can adopt and embed them into the cultural framework
- Expansion of the system to other languages
- Shift in how we understand democratic participation.

5.3.3 Key Takeaways on the Africa, MEWA & Europe region

- The participation of the private sector is necessary to develop and deploy the infrastructure needed for the smart city
- All sectors of the city should be a part of any plan and any development in the city
- Strong infrastructure is vital to have a smart city
- Data collection and mapping can be done by municipalities and NGOs
- Technology can help us, but we need to rely on a person to make the shift happen. Technology is a tool, not the means. Rely on a person to make the shift happen
- Use what is already accessible today

The concept of Smart City has evolved over the past 15 years; it is no longer defined by how much technology is available, but by solving problems, gathering information, and applying the right tools. Accessibility has transformed participation from something once unthinkable and intimidating into an empowering reality, making it possible for more people to engage. Achieving quick wins, such as raising awareness and offering short training, can deliver a significant impact, while laying the groundwork to tackle heavier problems, like settlement or urbanization, which is much more expensive and complex. Ultimately, technology alone cannot sustain smart cities, especially smaller ones, unless it is complemented by accessible infrastructure.

Key Themes and Insights

Today, cities are not equally benefiting all their citizens. To achieve healthy, prosperous, green, and sustainable cities **for everyone**, local governments need to work in partnership with service providers, entrepreneurs, social initiatives, and residents to advance an agenda that improves the quality of life and the economic and social development of all. This cooperation between stakeholders needs to be developed within a legal framework that recognizes the rights of every citizen, including those with disabilities, and that therefore underscores the key role of cities in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To close the deep gaps in opportunity and service quality that persist across cities, it is essential that any strategic plan be grounded in a human-centered approach that prioritizes the real needs, experiences, and aspirations of all residents. Technology is a key enabler of today's smart cities; accessibility must be embedded at the core of this digital transformation to be truly transformative.

City digital transformation is the process by which local governments use digital technologies, data, and innovative practices to improve the way urban services are designed, delivered, and managed. It involves rethinking city operations, governance models, and community engagement to create more efficient, inclusive, sustainable, and responsive urban environments.

This transformation goes beyond adopting new technologies; it requires:

- **Modernizing public services** (e-government, digital permits, smart mobility, digital health services)
- **Using data and analytics** to guide decisions, optimize resources, and anticipate needs
- **Improving connectivity and digital access** for all residents
- **Promoting interoperability** across departments to break silos
- **Strengthening cybersecurity and data governance**
- **Ensuring accessibility and inclusion** so that persons with disabilities, older persons, and underserved groups benefit equally
- **Building a culture of innovation** within government and the community
- **Fostering public-private-civil society collaboration**

In essence, **city digital transformation is about using technology strategically to improve quality of life, strengthen trust, expand access, and build more resilient and equitable cities.**

This Collaborative Webinar "**Engage for Inclusion**" creates a shared space where diverse stakeholders can exchange knowledge, strengthen one another's efforts, and advance a human-rights-based, human-centric approach to urban development. By working together to close persistent gaps and promote genuinely inclusive built and digital environments, the webinar supports the creation of cities that enhance quality of life and foster equitable economic and social development for all.

Key takeaways from the discussions

Emerging trends

1. **Data collection and analysis**: when done through an inclusive lens, this process ensures that the lived experiences of all residents, including persons with disabilities, older persons, and other marginalized groups, are accurately represented rather than overlooked. Inclusive data allows cities to identify inequities that may otherwise remain hidden, design targeted interventions, and allocate resources more fairly. Ultimately, high-quality, inclusive data collection and analysis enable evidence-based decisions that improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, and build cities that work for everyone.
2. **Interpreting services are** essential to ensuring that all residents can fully access and benefit from government services, regardless of language, communication needs, or abilities. By providing qualified interpreters, whether for sign language users, persons with limited spoken-language proficiency, or individuals who rely on alternative communication methods, governments remove critical barriers that often prevent persons from understanding their rights, completing administrative procedures, or receiving essential public support.

3. **Artificial Intelligence** is transforming communication by expanding the range of accessible tools available to persons with disabilities and older persons, enabling more independent, seamless, and equitable interaction with public services and daily life
4. **Digital skills development**: Engaging persons with disabilities and older persons in digital-skills development is essential for ensuring their full participation in an increasingly digital society. By providing accessible training, intuitive technologies, and ongoing support, cities and institutions empower these groups to confidently use digital tools to access public services, communicate, manage daily tasks, and participate in social and economic life. Strengthening digital skills not only reduces exclusion and dependency but also builds resilience, autonomy, and civic engagement.
5. **Inclusive mobility**: cornerstone of building cities that work for everyone. When transportation systems, roads, sidewalks, public transit, digital trip-planning tools, and public spaces are designed with accessibility in mind, they remove barriers that often isolate older persons, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. This leads to greater participation in community life, improved access to employment, education, healthcare, and cultural activities, and ultimately strengthens social cohesion.
6. **Ensure digital services and apps are free of data charges**: for many residents, especially low-income households, older persons, and persons with disabilities, the cost of mobile data is a major barrier to accessing online government services, transportation tools, telehealth, learning platforms, and emergency information. When key digital services are zero-rated or data-free, cities help level the playing field, allowing everyone to benefit equally from digital innovation. By removing cost barriers, smart cities can create a more equitable digital ecosystem in which all residents can engage fully, regardless of their economic circumstances
7. **Workforce inclusion**: vital for the success of any smart city because they ensure that all residents, regardless of age, ability, gender, socioeconomic background, or education level, can participate in and benefit from economic growth. When cities invest in accessible job pathways, inclusive hiring practices, and targeted upskilling programs, they open the labor market to persons with disabilities, older persons, and other underrepresented groups who are often excluded from future-oriented digital economies.
8. **Smart Cities definition**: remains a complex and ambiguous concept, often co-opted by different sectors to suit their own technological or commercial agendas. Since there is no single, concrete definition, an opportunity arises to move beyond solely from the high-tech towards a truly universal design.

Global challenges

1. **Digital skill gaps**: unequal distribution of knowledge and abilities needed to confidently use digital tools, online services, and emerging technologies. These gaps disproportionately affect older persons, persons with disabilities, low-income residents, and individuals with limited access to education or technology, creating barriers to employment, public services, and social participation. In smart cities,

such disparities can deepen exclusion and limit residents' ability to benefit from innovation. Closing digital skill gaps through accessible training, assistive technologies, and inclusive learning opportunities is essential to ensure that all people can participate fully in digital life, make informed decisions, and contribute to a more equitable and connected urban future.

2. **Digital ageism**: technologies, services, and digital platforms are designed without considering the needs, abilities, or preferences of older users, leading to exclusion from essential services, limited access to information, and reduced participation in social and economic life. Addressing digital ageism requires inclusive design, accessible interfaces, targeted digital skills programs, and a cultural shift that values the experiences and capabilities of older persons, ensuring they are active participants in a truly inclusive digital society.
3. **Algorithmic bias:** systematic and unfair discrimination that emerges when artificial intelligence systems, automated decision-making tools, or data-driven algorithms produce outcomes that disadvantage certain individuals or groups. These biases often stem from unrepresentative or incomplete data, flawed assumptions in model design, or historical patterns of inequality embedded within the data itself. As a result, algorithms can reinforce or amplify discrimination in areas such as hiring, housing, healthcare, policing, and access to public services, particularly impacting marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and older persons, whose needs are often underrepresented in training datasets. Addressing algorithmic bias requires inclusive data practices, transparent governance, continuous monitoring, and the intentional involvement of diverse communities to ensure that AI systems promote fairness and equity rather than perpetuate existing inequalities.

Global opportunities

Government policies can encourage the development of smart cities by ensuring that key enabling factors are met. Best tools, digital or not, that you can implement to be more agile and gather more information.

Way forward

Building on this momentum, our objective for 2026 is to engage 100 cities and to continue identifying, exchanging, and promoting inclusive and resilient technical solutions among a diverse range of stakeholders.

Call to action

We invite cities, civil society, and the private sector around the world to share the policies, solutions, practices, and innovations they have deployed to ensure that every resident, regardless of age, ability, or background, can fully participate in urban life. We are especially interested in initiatives that prioritize inclusion from the start, whether through accessible digital services, universal design standards, community-centered programs, or processes that guarantee an accessible built environment. By contributing your experiences, you help create a shared knowledge base that supports cities

everywhere in advancing equity, accessibility, and human-centered development. Together, we can accelerate progress toward cities that truly work for all.

https://forms.office.com/r/cWwD97NRDp?origin=lprLink

7.1 Host organizations

The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs- G3ict

G3ict is a nonprofit that defines, promotes, and enhances the accessibility of content, services, products, and environments for persons with disabilities by engaging with international organizations, the public and private sectors, nonprofits, and educational institutions on their journey toward inclusion.

G3ict aims to create a world where all persons with disabilities will have equal access to digital content, products, services and environments according to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

United Cities Local Governments - UCLG

As a global network of cities and local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations, UCLG represents, defends, and amplifies the voices of local and regional governments to leave no-one and no place behind and promoting a future in which the ideals of the SDGs are a lived reality.

Through collaboration, dialogue, cooperation, and knowledge-sharing, UCLG is working to advance global response and action through groundbreaking commitments and agreements that tie communities together, to uplift and empower the local level.

7.2 Speakers

Moderators

Speaker	Organization
Monica Duhem	Global Initiative Inclusive ICTs – G3ict
Federico Batista Poitier	United Cities & Local Governments - UCLG

Organizations of Persons with Disabilities Perspectives

Speaker	Organization
Sayomdeb Mukherjee (Den)	EnAble India - India
Santosh Kumar Rungta,	World Blind Union - World
Victor Pineda	Center of Independent Living – USA
Luis Quintana	Todo Accesible – Mexico
Michael Kanyingi Kimuhu,	Mangu Integrated Community Project - Kenya

Cities' representatives shared experiences

Speaker	City, Country
Víctor Zhuang	Singapore, Singapore
Nina Asterina	Makassar, Indonesia
César Mancera	Mexico City, Mexico
Martha Jackson	New York, USA
Gabriel Bueno da Costa	São Paulo, Brazil
Alba Mestres & Laura Trujillo	Barcelona, Spain
William Modupe, Pete Masters, Michael Otieno	Freetown, Sierra Leone

Global Development and Donor

Speaker	Organization
Sara Ceddia and Jin Hwang	World Sustainable Smart City Organization- WeGo
Choonsoo Kim	SK Telecom - Korea
Albert Llado	United Cities & Local Governments - UCLG
Cecile Roth	United Cities & Local Governments - UCLG
Simon Peter Mwesigye	UN Habitat
Ola Abualghaib	UN Global Disability Fund